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## Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England*

Longman, Harlow, 2011, 244 pp., ISBN 978 1 4058 5902 8

**Mark Roodhouse**

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## REFERENCES

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- <sup>1</sup> *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England* is the sequel to Clive Emsley's evergreen textbook *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*, first published in 1987 and now in its fourth edition. As Emsley points out, 24 years is a long time to wait for a sequel, but this hiatus reflects the sparse historiography. Although scholars made tentative forays into the history of twentieth-century crime from the late 1980s onwards, historians colonized the century slowly, deferring to criminologists who had already laid claim to the territory. Historical knowledge is patchy with a lot known about gender and crime, but very little about property crime for instance. This, then, is the first attempt to explore crime and criminal justice for a student audience. Having spent more than 30 years' researching the history of crime and policing, Emsley is in an ideal position to survey the historiography, plug some of the gaps and suggest future lines of inquiry.
- <sup>2</sup> Emsley takes a thematic approach to the subject. To help students get their bearings, his first substantive chapter describes the pattern of crime using official figures. Having shown their weaknesses, Emsley concludes that crime rose across most of the century, rising more sharply in the second half, before levelling off and possibly declining at its end. The subsequent three chapters summarize what is known about criminal careers, young offenders and 'professional' criminals. The tales he recounts owe much to the work of Barry Godfrey, Louis Jackson and Dick Hobbs respectively, and chime with criminological studies of these topics. The next two chapters consider the media and expert narratives that shaped public perception of crime. The chapters

provide an accessible introduction to crime reporting, TV crime dramas, crime films, life writing and criminology. True crime writing and edited trial transcripts are notable absences that reflect gaps in the historiography. The final part of the book examines the law-and-order bureaucracy. David Garland's ideas about penal welfarism shape Emsley's account of police, courts and prisons. Like Garland, Emsley portrays the period down to the late 1960s as a period when a liberal approach to law and order guided criminal justice policy with an anti-permissive backlash initiating a more punitive approach led to wholesale reforms under both Conservative and Labour governments.

- 3 There is much to savour here. *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England* provides a very good introduction to the historiography as it stands. Emsley points out some of its deficiencies, which should inspire undergraduate dissertations on property crime amongst other things. Like its sister volume, this should become a standard text for courses on crime in modern England and is the ideal accompaniment to *Police and Policing in the Twentieth Century* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011) edited by Emsley's colleague Chris Williams.
- 4 In any future edition Emsley might consider including separate chapters on gender and crime, and ethnicity and crime to stand alongside the chapter on youth. As he notes, there is a rich literature on these topics, which would allow students to hone their critical skills. Written in a lucid and enjoyable style, the book is eminently readable. The inclusion of a chronology, marginal glosses, and boxed guides to key debates, events and people would improve its accessibility further. The thematic approach also lends itself to putting suggested reading at the end of each chapter rather than at the end as Emsley does.
- 5 Like all introductory surveys, *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England* leaves university teachers with much food for thought. Students and general readers will not necessarily notice the book's omissions. For example the chapters on courts and penal policy, like the slim literature on these topics, do not discuss the use of fines, court orders and probation. The lack of interest in these topics might account for the peculiarly prison-centric view we have of punishment. Another challenge facing Emsley and others is how to engage with the work of social scientists. This is something all modern and contemporary historians must face. The more we rely upon criminological and sociological studies, the more we need to understand the circumstances of their production, dissemination and reception. There is also a strong case for historians re-examining social scientific data to see what other stories they might tell. When set alongside further studies of court registers and police records, secondary data analysis could help Emsley to flesh out the next edition of the book.

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